A Sociology of Higher Education: The Japanese University in the Context of Japanese Culture, Social Organization, and Social Stratification

This paper examines the status of Japanese higher education to understand the impact of important characteristics of Japanese culture and social organization on the development of the university system and its function in the society. From a year and a half of "participant observation" in Japanese universities by the author, basic sociological principles from theorists such as Simmel, Coser, Park, and Gouldner are applied in an analysis of the Japanese culture and universities. A restraining and tradition bound group orientation within the Japanese society has made innovation and the individual competition of ideas within Japanese universities difficult. But though less actual education and research may be achieved in Japanese universities, these universities play an extremely important function in elite selection, and occupational attainment more generally. More than other countries the elite selection process goes through only a few universities, primarily Tokyo University, and to a larger degree than elsewhere is based upon "contested mobility" rather than "sponsored mobility," at least at the level of university entrance and completion.

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For many years now, Japanese elementary and high school students have ranked above students from all other countries in international comparisons of test scores (Lynn 1988; Rohlen 1983). Understandably, therefore, we find much written about the quality of primary and secondary education in Japan.[1] We find much less written about the university system in Japan. And ironically, when we do, it is almost exclusively negative, such as the following from a best selling book about Japan: "Scientists at Japanese universities are hampered by an extremely rigid academic hierarchy that keeps talented researchers in subservient positions, and by excessive regulations decreed by education bureaucrats" (van Wolferen 1989:89). As for the end product of the Japanese university system, "...in most fields, Japanese college graduates bring to their jobs little more than the dusted-off remnants of a super intensive high school education--the same standardized package that emphasizes memorization rather than originality or synthesis" (Taylor 1983:100). It seems the working environment for Japanese professors, graduate students, and university based researchers has been somewhat less than ideal.

The above observations are meant to suggest that any attempt at understanding the status of university education and any particular field of study in a particular country, especially in the social sciences, must include an analysis of the society and culture within which education and research must exist and develop. The present paper will *begin* what can be called "a sociology of Japanese higher education" in the spirit of the tradition of a sociology of sociology in the United States (e.g., Gouldner 1970; Reynolds and Reynolds

1970; Friedrichs 1970; Strasser 1976).

Much of the information in this paper is based upon approximately one and one-half years of participant observation by the author in a major national university, a small private regional university, and a junior college in Japan. The focus will be on the major universities, such as the national universities and the top private universities, and not the junior colleges and the less prestigious, regional four year colleges. The first section of this paper will consider some basic facts about Japanese higher education before turning to how the Japanese university system has been influenced by the wider socio-cultural context.

HIGHER EDUCATION IN JAPAN: THE HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT

Before the mid-19th century, the top of the stratification system was rather closed in Japan. During the 1600s, and until 1863, in fact, Japan had something quite similar to the Indian caste system (Hane 1982). Almost from the beginning of rule by the Tokugawa Shogun of this time period, a rigid system of social stratification was instituted which prohibited movement from the rank in which one was born. Thus, prior to Japan's industrialization, there was no tradition of upward movement through merit selection as existed for Mandrians in China and Yangban in Korea (Reischuaer 1977:46).

Dramatic change, however slowly it began, was dictated by Japan's forced opening to the outside world. With the need for rapid industrialization, daimyo feudal lords and their samurai lost formal positions of status and wealth. The architects of the new Japanese social order realized that modernization and industrialization required a more educated elite, one selected through at least some system based upon merit. With this in mind, the new Japanese educational system was modeled on that of France and Germany, with the university system eventually coming to resemble the German model of the time most closely (Reischuaer 1977:168; Gluck 1985:19). The tough high school and college entrance examinations that are well known in Japan today also got their start in the late 1800s with this restructuring of education for modernization (Rohlen 1983:59).

For selection and training of the truly elite, which at the time primarily meant staffing the government ministries, the Imperial University, now known as Tokyo University, or Todai for short, was selected. There was no masking of intention, no apologies for what they were doing: they wanted an Oxford, Cambridge, Harvard, Princeton, Yale all in one--if not in quality, at least in its importance for elite selection. The Meiji Emperor himself appeared each year to hand out gifts to the graduates of this elite training institution to stress the importance of their new status as graduates of this most elite of universities (Gluck 1985:85; Halliday 1975:36-39).

Equality of educational opportunity, however, does not come automatically with the introduction of objective entrance examinations. From 1882 to the turn of the century, for example, around 90 percent of the Todai students had samurai family backgrounds: it was only those from privileged backgrounds who had the time for study needed to pass the entrance exams (Halliday 1975:25, 119). It was only in the post World War II period that relative equality of higher educational opportunity in Japan came to resemble that in the other advanced industrial nations. And in contrast to the American myth of "the land of opportunity," there is surprisingly little difference among industrial nations in the amount of movement up and down the stratification system, or in the level of equality of opportunity through education in these societies (Featherman and Hauser 1978; Featherman, Jones, and Hauser 1975; Grusky and Hauser 1984). This is no less the case for Japan, despite its reputation as a society where education is much more important (Ishida 1993). However, while equality of educational opportunity and the status attainment process in general may be similar in Japan, that does not mean the educational system, and higher education in particular, operate in the same manner: there may be differences in how students are taught, what they are taught, and the process of university research, as there certainly are in Japan. It is to these differences and some of the reasons for these differences in Japanese higher education that we now turn.

THE UNIVERSITY SETTING

A walk around any major university campus in Japan will bring scenes reminiscent of American universities: students seem to be cheerfully talking about parties, rock music, and other familiar things as they walk to class; professors are carrying briefcases, maps, and perhaps lab materials on the way to class; and there are campus buildings that can be identified as faculty offices, libraries, gyms, and research labs. For the most part, what goes on during the average day on the Japanese university campus is rather similar to any other in Europe or the United States. But there are subtle differences that have some affects on how academics teach their students and conduct their research.

The Students. Japanese professors often exaggerate the lack of seriousness in their students. But any period of time teaching at a Japanese university will convince an American professor that the exaggeration is not great--the students *are* less serious about their studies compared to American students. This fact may puzzle Americans who have an image of hard working Japanese high school students, and hard working Japanese people in general, but there is a logic to the lack of pressure on these students. It is assumed that: 1) these are the best and brightest young people in Japan (as indicated by the fact that they have been among the very few to pass the very tough college entrance exams), so why should they be pressured to study; 2) because of the years of hard work and isolation to pass the entrance exams they deserve more free time at the university; and 3) it is especially important that the students now learn some social skills they were unable to learn during the years of study trying to get into the university. It is for this last reason that clubs and their activities become central to the events on campus. And finally, it can be said that Japanese high school graduates are on an academic level with American college seniors already, so the less rigorous university life does not create much of a hinderance to Japan.

What all of this means for university professors in Japan, among other things, is that not terribly much is demanded of them in the classroom. Professors are not especially rewarded for, or expected to, provide stimulating lectures. Students do at times complain among themselves about boring classes, but they are not overly concerned about the situation as long as demands on the students are not too great.

For their part, students seldom ask questions in class or challenge the words of their professors. None of this is helped by the fact that, unlike in American universities, Japanese students are required to take as many as 10 different subjects per academic semester, with each class commonly meeting less than two hours per week. It is impossible to assign textbooks in most of these subjects, and some classes require little outside reading. At the end of the term these students must decide which final exams from all of their classes they have a reasonable chance of passing, then the other exams are not taken, and these classes are removed from their records until taken again with a passing grade on the final exam.

It should not be concluded from the above, however, that the university professor has a life any easier than his/her American counterpart. For one thing, there are endless committees and other university work to attend to. But also, the students do make demands in other ways. Professors are expected to maintain more personal contacts with their students, somewhat like parental figures. And in one of the most time consuming jobs, professors are expected to maintain a network of contacts with possible employers and to involve themselves personally in finding jobs for their students. The role of high schools and high school teachers in finding jobs for their non-college track students has received some recent research attention (Rosenbaum and Kariya 1989), but it must be recognized that much the same is expected on the university level.

The Faculty. Some characteristics of the Japanese university and administrative rules might make it appear as if there is no pressure on faculty to do research, improve their teaching, or keep abreast of their academic subject. For example, as it is in large Japanese corporations, there is lifetime employment for faculty. There is no system of deciding tenure as in American universities: tenure is, in effect, granted when the faculty are hired. Combined with the fact that university professors are not often paid especially well compared to other

professional people in Japan, the above may lead us to expect that university professors in Japan are not an especially motivated and talented group of people.[2] But such an assumption is not correct.

It is important to recognize first that university professors are given considerable respect in Japan, allowing universities to attract some of the best and brightest students away from corporate positions.[3] More importantly, however, there are promotion decisions made with respect to merit, and effective peer group pressure is brought to bear in motivating faculty to continue professional development, research, and publication.

A more important set of factors influencing the *quality* of academic work and creativity by Japanese faculty has to do with the interrelation between group structure (to be discussed more directly below) and the old German model of the university in Japan. This German model is evident first in graduate training: The student-master relationship is very strong, with the professor seen as a father figure who is responsible for his/her student's success and well-being at the university and in later life. For his/her part, the student is expected to give extensive respect and deference to his/her professor, perform all sorts of tasks in and out of the university for the professor (that American students would find demeaning), and, of course, give unquestioned respect to the ideas, research, and writing of that professor. This respect demanded of the student traditionally has extended until late into life because of the old method of granting Ph.D.s. Under this system a person does not spend a limited number of years as a graduate student with the expectation of a Ph.D. at the end. In Japan, especially in the social sciences and humanities, graduate student years lead to help in getting an academic job and the chance to be *invited* to write a dissertation for the Ph.D. in mid-career (at about age 40), if the major professor and/or the university department where graduate work was done have deemed the person's achievements (and respect for the professors there) have reflected well upon the university.

A similar type of master-student relationship among university faculty in Japan, however, is carried on within each academic department. Senior faculty are to be respected and their theories and research are not to be criticized by junior faculty. Traditionally, this master relationship for senior faculty meant that nothing was published by junior faculty without the approval of the senior faculty, and commonly a senior faculty person's name would be listed as one of the authors of any publication by a junior faculty member, even without any contribution by the senior person.[4]

It should be evident that the main point of all the above is that the competition of ideas and freedom to develop new ideas have been more difficult in Japanese universities. The structure of the Japanese university alone is not responsible for the relative lack of free inquiry, as we will see below. However, these problems in the university structure have been recognized by Japanese academics and changes are in progress. For example, the Ministry of Education has approved a new system for granting Ph.D.s modeled on the American system. And professional academic organizations (such as the Japanese Sociological Association) have recommend that the practice of senior faculty automatically taking some responsibility for the publications of junior faculty be discontinued.

THE SOCIO-CULTURAL CONTEXT OF JAPANESE HIGHER EDUCATION

There are, without question, many excellent university scientists and scholars in Japan. However, especially in the social sciences and humanities, but in most other fields to a somewhat lesser degree, combined with the traditional aspects of the university system described above, there are other characteristics of social structure and cultural values in Japan that make it difficult to train objective and creative scientists and scholars. Four of these barriers are discussed here: 1) the vertical structure of groups in Japan; 2) the tradition of what Goffman might have called "civil inattention" with respect to controversial subjects; 3) lack of experience with or tradition of free universal discourse; and 4) a homogeneous culture which demands a high degree of in-group unity.

Group Structure. Much has been discussed and debated about the nature of "vertical group structure" in Japan from the work of the noted Japanese social scientist Chie Nakane (1970). The basic idea is that groups in Japan, in contrast to other industrial nations, are more often structured along vertical status and authority lines. This means that important groups within which people spend much of their time contain people of unequal rank and status, rather that being relatively homogeneous with respect to class, authority, and prestige of the group members. This also means that people in these groups make relatively more personal attachments to people of superior and inferior rank compared to other industrial nations.. Among the outcomes of vertical group structure, it is said, is less class conflict, less class identification, and more cooperation and unity in the work place (Hendry 1987).

There are many critiques of Nakane's ideas on group structure (and especially questions about how many people actually spend much of their time in such groups), and the concepts associated with Nakane's work have been over used and simplified. But there is empirical support for Nakane's argument that vertical group ties are relatively more important in Japan.[5] And there is wide agreement that attachments between a junior member of a group and a senior member are important from the time a person enters a new group in Japan. What this means is that a new member to a group needs a sponsor or mentor for his/her protection, advancement, and education into the ways of the group. Japanese tradition also calls for those on top to take care of those below in return for loyalty: throughout Japanese history many folktales describe the problems of a person (often referred to as a *rōnin*, or "masterless samurai") without such sponsorship and protection. This need for a senior sponsor continues to be the case in a company, government bureaucracies, politics, academics, professions, and student groups. The junior (*kōhai*) in the relationship must give allegiance and unquestioned support to the senior (*sempai*), even more than to other senior members of the organization or group, in return for the protection and sponsorship.

The relevance of the *sempai-kōhai* relationship to academics should be evident. In fact, this relationship underlies many aspects of the university system described above. The senior faculty will take junior faculty "under their wing," and in return for their protection the junior faculty must be careful to support the theoretical perspectives and research of their *sempai* to a much greater extent than would be found with a student or junior faculty and her/his mentor in the American university system. For academics in Japan this means at least two senior sponsors they must worry about: the senior faculty at their current university department and the mentor (or mentors) at the university where they have done their graduate work but have yet to be invited to write the Ph.D. dissertation. There is therefore a tendency for a person's career to be advanced more by loyalty to the ideas of senior faculty than by one's own creativity and unique contributions to the discipline. Or in other words, describing this association more widely in the Japanese society, van Wolferen (1989:169) writes that attachments to individuals are more important than attachments to ideals in furthering one's career.

Avoidance of Controversy. In his popular book on Japanese society, when writing about the outcaste *burakumin* who continue to be discriminated against in Japan today, Christopher (1983:50) states, "It is a reasonable bet, for example, that when this book is translated into Japanese, this particular portion of it will be quietly omitted." It has since been translated: He was right. Many foreign scholars have complained that their works critical of some aspect of Japan will not be published in Japan, or that portions of their works dealing with what the Japanese view to be controversial (such as discrimination against *burakumin*, Koreans, Chinese, or Japanese organized crime--*Yakuza*) are omitted from their works when translated into Japanese. As for another example, the authors of the highly respected book on the *yakuza* (Kaplan and Dubro 1986) have yet to find a Japanese publisher for their book.

The tendency for "civil inattention" toward controversial subjects can result in self-censorship in the press (van Wolferen 1989:94), but at times there is more organized pressure for the avoidance of "sensitive subjects." For example, van Wolferen (1989:177-179) describes

the power of the Dentsu advertising agency which controls about one-forth of all advertising in Japan (compared to about 3.5% for the largest advertising agency in the United States). There are many examples in which the agency has used its power to limit controversial subjects on television and other mass media.

It would be too simple to suggest that controversial issues are covered-up only by political elites or any other powerful group in the society. Many observers of Japan claim that this "civil inattention" with respect to controversial subjects is an aspect of Japanese culture. It is argued that more than other people the Japanese have a propensity to accept that certain things should be hidden that could cause hard feelings between people or reflect badly upon themselves and their group (Doi 1986). There are even two common terms for this attitude and its opposite--*tatemae* and *honne*. *Tatemae* means to keep the true nature of a situation hidden, to present only the "official position," or to maintain a "front," while *honne* refers to the actual facts of a situation. What must be recognized is that *tatemae* does not necessarily have a negative connotation of lying; it can at times have a positive connotation of showing that you have a kind heart because you do not want to say anything that will make someone uncomfortable, feel bad, or "lose face" (Doi 1986:43). Putting it more strongly, van Wolferen (1989:235) writes that the cultural concept of *tatemae* "provides a frame of reference in which many forms of deceit are socially sanctioned."

The main point of the above is that it will be more difficult to be objective, to openly state what one believes is the truth, or to obtain accurate information on many subjects in this type of cultural context. Van Wolferen (1989:333), among others, does in fact claim that social scientists often avoid controversial subjects, especially with recent events.

Weak Tradition of Free Universal Discourse. Putting it strongly, as van Wolferen (1989:333) is apt to do, it can be said that "In Japan...argument is associated with conflict itself, and, since all conflict is defined as bad, arguing and debating are not usually recognized as healthy ways to settle disputes." More specifically to scholars and intellectuals, "Intellectuals are rarely asked to prove or disprove their hypotheses, and consequently are themselves not very good at critical evaluation" (van Wolferen 1989:237).

For anyone who has spent time with Japanese academics, it is obvious that the above is overstated. However, it does appear that many Japanese scholars are less comfortable with open debate over their theories and research.[6] Scholarly meetings in Japan are more likely orderly and highly regulated. A paper is given, then the floor is open for questions. However, the section organizer controls the questioning, making sure that the senior ranking scholars in the room are able to ask their questions (seldom threatening), one after another, moving down the rank order of scholars in the room. Serious questions may be asked, but very negative comments are rare, and best saved for other close colleagues in private.

The limits on free debate and criticism, however, are not restricted to the public forum. Published commentary critical of someone's scholarly work is less common in Japan as well. And it is said that film, theater, and music critics do not exist as we know them in the United States because it is believed to be impolite to attack someone or someone's work in such a public manner.

The Effects of Strong In-Group Unity. In his essay, *The Stranger*, Simmel (1950) noted that the stranger is "not radically committed to the unique ingredients and peculiar tendencies of the group, and therefore approaches them with the specific attitude of objectivity." Further, Simmel argued that "Objectivity may also be defined as freedom: the objective individual is bound by no commitments which could prejudice his perception, understanding, and evaluation of the given." In a similar manner, Robert Park (1928:201) described the "marginal man" as "the emancipated individual" who "invariably becomes in a certain sense and to a certain degree a cosmopolitan. He learns to look upon the world in which he was born and bred with something of the detachment of a stranger."

In his writings on conflict, Lewis Coser (1956, 1967) notes that in-group unity and out-group conflict usually go hand in hand. The greater the outside is seen as different and perhaps threatening, the stronger will be the unity within the group, and the greater will be the pressure for all in the group to accept the dominant world view. With especially strong

group unity, the critic or dissenter will not be tolerated, but viewed as a renegade, traitor, and deviant worse than the enemy (also see Collins 1975:305, 380). Rosabeth Kanter's (1972) studies of closed communes further confirms these ideas of the effects of in-group versus out-group conflict.

Japan has been described by virtually all observers as the most culturally unified industrial society (see especially Hendry 1987; Reischauer 1987; Nakane 1970). Approximately 97 percent of the population are racially and ethnically Japanese. And there is a strong feeling of "uniqueness" among the Japanese people which is fed by the many popular books on *Nihonjinron* (the study of the Japanese) which tell the Japanese how "truly different" they are from outsiders, and how outsiders can never really understand the Japanese. The "ideology of Japaneseness" has been described as almost a religion: "The religious character of Japanese society helps explain the poverty of Japanese intellectual probing of society. Where social concerns are forever paramount, and have religious significance, analysis of society is akin to analysis of the divinity, and such analysis always undermines faith" (van Wolferen 1989:277).

If it can be said that the well trained social scientist is something like the "marginal man" or "stranger" in the words of Park and Simmel, it can be concluded from the above that training in the social sciences in Japan must be a difficult task. But once the objective and critical perspective is obtained by a social scientist, the stronger sense of in-group versus out-group and homogeneous culture of Japan is more likely to make the social scientist the "marginal" outsider, and even affect the theoretical focus of social scientists. We can use the example of Japanese sociology.

Most generally it can be said that sociology in Japan has been, and continues to be, primarily theoretical.[7] The extensive theoretical rather than empirical focus of Japanese sociology is related to the more extensive contacts early Japanese sociologists had with European sociologists in the first half of the 20th century (Yamagishi and Brinton 1980). It was along with this contact, especially from German universities, that the influence of German sociology more specifically came to Japan.[8]

In addition to the theoretical focus in Japanese sociology gained from Europe, more specifically there has been a heavy emphasis on Marxian sociology, which continues to this day. Yamagishi and Brinton (1980) claim that this Marxian emphasis came to Japanese sociologists during the 1920s, during the brief but relatively liberal Taisho Democracy in Japan (Reischauer and Craig 1978). This was a time when young Japanese scholars were focusing on the extensive social problems, very high inequality, and extensive labor conflicts brought on by Japan's rapid industrialization under the powerful *zaibatsu* capitalist class (Hane 1982).[9] Van Wolferen (1989:79), however, argues that most of the Marxian influence among teachers and academics in Japan came after World War II as part of the general reaction against the capitalist-military ruling class that led Japan into the War.[10] But whichever is more the case, a primary point here is that there appears to be a bigger split among the Marxian oriented and functional sociologists in Japan. Following what was noted above, once a person becomes a renegade in a more unified society, that person is pushed further away from the group, in this case with respect to world views, and there is less middle ground between those critical of the status quo and those who take it for granted.

ELITE SELECTION AN CREDENTIALISM

In this final section we move back to a more macro perspective of the Japanese society and the place of education to consider the social functions of university education in Japan. Perhaps more than in any other industrial society, the primary functions of university "education" in Japan seem to be other than education. Collins's (1979, 1975) concept of credentialism certainly fits university education in Japan. The most important thing is to get into the best university possible to maximize career opportunities; what you learn there is not so important. Very few students who are successful in entering an elite university fail to graduate, and the course work is not particularly challenging. Thus, the key is to pass the very extensive entrance examinations described above.

With respect to income, on the other hand, research indicates that an elite university degree in Japan does not especially make a difference (Ishida 1993). Thus, one is tempted to ask why is there so much drama every February when "exam hell" comes around. But with much less income inequality than in the United States and most other industrial nations (Kerbo 1991, 1992), a small statistical significance means more. But more importantly, there are also status and power dimensions which are more pronounced in Japanese career positions that are affected by a university degree (Kerbo 1991). Finally, the avenues to elite positions are much more concentrated in Japan, and students have only one chance each year for a exam, for *one* university--there are no national examination boards which pass test scores to many universities. Students have one chance, for one university per year. If they miss on the one exam to get into that one university, their options are to wait until next year or go to a third rate university, junior college, or enter the labor force. And further, with age ranking so important in Japan, students can at best afford to try a second or third year to get into an elite university. A person in his/her mid-20s is very seldom seen entering a university for the first time in Japan.

With respect to elite selection in Japan, as noted above, the avenues are highly concentrated, and at the university level the process is best described as "contest mobility" rather than "sponsored mobility" (Turner 1960). First, the concentrated avenues of elite attainment in Japan should be considered.

Tokyo University can be called the Japanese Harvard, Yale, Princeton, and more, all in one. There are few other universities in Japan which can also put students on the elite track. In the United States, for example, recent research on the executives and board members of the largest 250 corporations indicate 5 percent graduated from Yale, 4 percent from Harvard, and less than 3 percent from Princeton (Ishida 1993:155-158). In contrast, a survey of the "154 top industrial elite" in Japan found 45 percent graduated from Tokyo University (Miyake et. al. 1985:41; for these figures and those to follow, also see Kerbo and McKinstry 1995). Considering the top three executives from the 10 largest banks, 5 largest trading companies, 5 largest electronics companies, and top 5 auto companies, 60 percent are graduates of Tokyo University (Kakuma 1981). Of the chairman of the powerful big business organization Keidanren, from 1946 to the present, all but one have been graduates of Tokyo University (Atsuta 1992). As for political elites, of 19 Japanese prime ministers from 1945 to 1993, 10 have been graduates of Tokyo University (Jin 1989; Hayakawa 1983). As for the very powerful government ministry in Japan, a 1976 survey of 1,600 persons in these ministry agencies at or above the rank of *kachō*, or department head, found 1,001 were graduates of Tokyo University. In 1981, of the seven heads of the largest and most important ministries, all but one were Tokyo University graduates (Kitagawa and Kainuma 1985:117-119).

At the level of university entrance for elite attainment, it is clearly contested mobility--the exams are very difficult, and must be passed to get into the university: a student's father can not buy a building for the university to get his son or daughter accepted. The offspring of the better educated and more wealthy do have an edge. Soon after World War II, reports indicate that 63 percent of Todai students had to work to pay for even the low Todai tuition, and as much as 10 to 14 percent were from working class backgrounds; quite remarkable given the elite status of the University, and when compared to other elite universities around the world (Vogel 1979:120; Reischuaer 1977:175). With the increasing use of expensive extra-educational programs to pass college entrance exams, such as the famous *juku* (after hours schools), this openness at universities such as Tokyo University has been eroded (Ishida 1993; Stevenson and Baker 1992). By 1982 over half of Todai students came from more expensive private high schools. And already by the middle 1960s the class backgrounds of students from the prestigious national universities including Tokyo University were again getting higher and higher, a trend which continued in the 1970s and 1980s (Rohlen 1983:129-137, 313). Still the point must be stressed, if the exam to enter Tokyo University is not passed, no matter how rich the parents, the chance of achieving an elite position is severely reduced. It is only after university graduation and the young person starts on a career that sponsored mobility takes effect in Japan.

CONCLUSION

It seems wise to conclude with a caution: it is easy to exaggerate the differences between Japan and industrial nations of the West. Japanese sociologists themselves are divided on the question of whether Japan has rather unique cultural values and the degree to which Japan and countries such as the United States are becoming more alike (Tominaga 1987), but the stronger arguments seem to lie on the side which argues that Japan is less different than most people seem to think. But, there are differences, as there are among all industrial nations.

When considering the overall role of the university in the Japanese society we have seen that compared to other industrial nations, the education of students or even research appear less important. And there are aspects of Japanese culture and social organization which make these tasks more difficult in a university setting in any respect. Rather, the function of university education in Japan fits the concepts of "credentialism" and "contested mobility" to a greater degree than elsewhere. Though less education may go on in places such as Tokyo University, getting in is very important for elite attainment--and getting in means passing a difficult objective examination. Whether or not one can say the "best and the brightest" get into Tokyo University (and a few other elite universities), and subsequently into the most elite positions in Japan, it certainly appears that this is the case, especially among the Japanese people. And if nothing else, it is this aspect of the university system that provides a legitimation process for elite influence and the Japanese stratification system.

NOTES

1. Which is not to say, however, that primary and secondary education in Japan is without problems. Problems most commonly cited are lack of creativity and less skill in presenting verbal arguments due to a curriculum focused on memorization of facts and figures.

2. There likely are more opportunities for consulting income, and other income from writing and mass media appearances, when compared to professors in the United States, especially in the social sciences. But the standard of living observed among Japanese university faculty remains lower than for faculty in the united States and certainly some European countries such as Germany.

3. A qualitative analysis of the status of the university professor, or any other high status person in Japan for that matter, is made easy by the interaction rituals and status markers required by the Japanese language (Kerbo and Sha 1987). The degree of the bow given a professor and the highly respectful language used to address a professor can be compared to the level of status deference given to people in other positions and occupations to indicate the high level of status given to university professors. And the ranking of the university is also important: Tokyo University professors can be observed invoking very deep bows and especially honorific forms of address in other Japanese.

4. This practice of a senior faculty person being listed as one of the authors has even applied to the publications in Japan by visiting foreign faculty. On occasion visiting foreign faculty members have reported their surprise upon finding the name of a senior Japanese faculty member listed with theirs on the work when the manuscript is returned by the departmental secretary for proof reading.

5. For example, in a massive study of 50 corporations in the United States and 50 corporations i Japan, with questionnaire data from about 5,000 workers in each country, Lincoln and Kalleberg found that Japanese workers had more frequent interactions with superiors and less with equal co-workers, they were more likely to prefer help and advice from superiors, more likely to say their boss was involved in many aspects of their lives, and to say they liked it this way. In the United States, in addition to the contrast with all of the above, Americans more often said their jobs were more rewarding when their boss leaves them alone, and they preferred to interact much more with equal co-workers (Lincoln and Kalleberg 1990:91, 98, 108-111, 142).

6. For example, a Japanese sociologist attending an ASA meeting for the first time has commented on the "rudeness" of the debate, with everyone trying to argue with each other to prove they are right.

7. The same can be said for most of the social sciences in Japan, including even social work. During a meeting with faculty and administrators of the most respected graduate training center for social work in Japan, the author of this paper was surprised to find that this program did not have required internships for students. The curricula is dominated by theories in social work, sociology, and psychology, with no practical training in the form of internships.

8. These contacts, of course, were not limited to German sociologists, and there is an interesting story about their contacts with Herbert Spencer. The Meiji Constitution and political system was based upon the British model. it is reported that the visiting Japanese scholars in England who were studying the British system of government consulted Herbert Spencer, who told them that they should keep the Japanese stress on hierarchy of the past and as much as possible reject any Western individualism when modernizing Japan (Benedict 1946:84). The response of these Japanese scholars has not been reported, but historical developments seem to acknowledge their agreement.

9. As an example of this high inequality of the time, we can note that in contrast to the low 8 to 1 gap in income between corporate executives and the lowest ranked workers today, in the 1920s this income gap was 100 to 1 (Abegglen and Stalk 1985:191). during the 1930s in Japan, about 16 percent of the people had over to percent of the income, and the top .0019 percent of the people had 10 percent of the income (Hane 1982:11).

10. It is useful to note that it is both secondary and university educators in Japan that have this heavy Marxian influence. The teachers union in Japan, *Nikkyoso*, has been one of the main opponents of the Japanese government since World War II and one of the main supporters of the Japanese Socialist Party.

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